

But, deservedly, the best known of these gargoyles is Gluttony, whose steps churchward are somehow diverted into a tavern full of very strange company; drunken and vomiting, in the end, he is lugged home by wife and wench, only to wake after two days' torpor and stutter, as he wakes, 'Where is the wine-bowl?'

I have dwelt on these passages because the general reader finds *Piers Plowman*, with its linguistic difficulties and its prolixities, usually too formidable. But anyone who wonders what life was like in those mediaeval hovels past which Chaucer rides with quick eyes averted and Froissart with polite finger to nostril, should follow Glo-toun to his pot-house. It is no perfumer's; its description is revolting enough to move the envious admiration of a certain type of modern writer:

His guttis gunne (began) to gothely • as two greddy sowes;

He pissed a potel • in ap[^]ter-wwter-while.

And there is yet worse to follow. But it is worth seeing

for once this grey and seamy underside of the cloth-of-

gold of chivalry. When Chaucer handles fraud and vice,

it is with such a delighted curiosity and interest in life

that the sting is taken out of them. When his swindling

alchemical canon rides after his pilgrims:

But it *was* joye for to se him swete,

His forehed dropped as a stilktoorie;

when his perfectly unconscionable pardoner preaches to

his simple-hearted dupes:

Than peyne I me to strecche forth my necke,
And est and west upon the people I bekke,
As doth a dowfe, sitting on a berne (barn);
Myn hondes and my tonge goon so yerne
(eagerly)

That it is *joye* to se my busynesse.
For us it is indeed; but to the author of *Piers
Plowman*,
poor, oppressed, puritanical, such things are
not at all a
joy; they are past a joke—matters rather for
rage and fury.